

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF GOVERNMENT SERVICE:
DEVELOPING BETTER SENIOR CIVILIAN LEADERS

by

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Biography

Mr. Bryan Moss is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. Prior to coming to the Air War College, Mr. Moss worked within the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) as an employee of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). Within the NRO, Mr. Moss manages the development, decomposition and allocation of enterprise requirements for the various systems which make up the nation's overhead intelligence collection enterprise. Mr. Moss has over 28 years of federal service, with various assignments across the Department of Defense and the Intelligence Community. He holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland and master's degrees from the National Intelligence University and Troy University.



Abstract

Department of Defense (DoD) planners have emphasized a Total Force approach in order to satisfy the increasing scope, variety, and complexity of the current operational environment. Under this approach, civilian and military leaders must be leveraged to reflect common strategic goals. Despite myriad initiatives to improve the development of the workforce, the civilian component is not trained or developed to be fully effective in key leadership positions. If the DoD is to effectively employ Total Force concepts and leverage all available human resources to fill key leadership positions, an initiative must be taken to professionalize the civilian work force.

Within this paper, my overall objective is to illustrate that the government workforce, which was originally structured to administer repetitive tasks, is not fully professionalized and does not fully embrace the concept of leadership development. The DoD must create a culture where leadership development is thrust upon the most junior civilian employees and maintained throughout one's career. To do this, the Department must be amenable to adopting a fundamentally different civilian force development strategy. The DoD should seek to professionalize the civilian workforce and reform its management systems to allow greater flexibility and afford early developmental opportunities for civilian employees. This change would improve the overall quality of the work force and lead to a larger pool of qualified civilian candidates to fill key leadership positions within the Department.

Introduction

The Department of Defense (DoD) is headed towards a strategic landscape that is characterized by increasing scope, variety, and complexity. In order to meet the needs of future operations, DoD planners have emphasized a Total Force approach in which civilian and military leaders must be leveraged to reflect common strategic goals. Today's environment of constrained resources is not likely to abate in the near future, therefore effective management and employment of the Total Force is paramount. This leads us to a key requirement for effective implementation of Total Force strategies: the ability to leverage civilians within key leadership positions across the DoD.

Recognizing deficiencies among senior civilian leaders, Secretary of Defense Gates charged the Defense Business Board (DBB) to conduct an analysis of the issue. In 2010, the DBB issued a report that described how DoD senior civilians were unwilling and unprepared to take on the responsibilities of leadership.¹ In spite of a number of initiatives to improve the development of the workforce, the civilian component is not trained or developed to be fully effective in key leadership positions. To grow better civilian leaders, the Department must professionalize the civilian workforce, reform position classification, restrict lateral accessions and enhance mobility opportunities.

This research paper uses a qualitative approach to support alternative approaches to civilian leader development. Within this discussion, I will first examine the ideal employment of human resources towards fulfillment of the concept of Total Force. I will also evaluate the notion that equivalencies exists between government civilians and uniformed servicemen. Focus will then shift to the identification of inherent challenges within the civil service system that marginalize the development of civilian leaders, which in turn, marginalize Total Force

management. Professionalization of civil service will be defined and offered as a solution to effect improved development of DoD civilians. I will also offer constructive changes to federal civil service manpower management that could facilitate the development of civilian employees, which will ultimately lead to a senior civilian corps that can be effectively leveraged in positions of high responsibility.



Ideals of Total Force

In its broadest sense, the concept of Total Force employment requires that all elements of DoD human resources be leveraged to accomplish the mission. These resources include active duty military, the reserve component, civilian employees and contractors. Within the DoD, the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness is charged with developing policies, plans, and programs to ensure the readiness of the Total Force.² To the casual observer, the emphasis on Total Force employment may appear to be a recent development; however, the concept first appeared in 1953. The original architect of the Total Force was Theodore C. Mars, who as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense established the goal of converting total force concepts into official defense policy.³ This initiative assumed greater urgency in the 1970's, as shrinking post-Vietnam defense budgets forced reductions in overall end strengths, which in turn, forced a greater reliance on the capabilities afforded by the reserve component.⁴

In recent years, a greater emphasis has been placed on getting the most from DoD civilians. In the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the DoD is challenged to better employ the talents of its civilian personnel. Consequently, Secretary of Defense Gates created the Civilian Expeditionary Workforce (CEW), which facilitated the employment of civilian experts to support efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. A key feature of the CEW program is that it afforded deploying civilian employees access to training that was commensurate to that required of military personnel.⁵ The CEW program made great strides towards ensuring DoD civilians were properly trained to perform within a contingency environment. However, concepts of standardized training and/or education were not extended to the broader civilian workforce.

GS grade to Military rank equivalencies

Within the DoD, there exists the idea of equivalencies between certain civilian grades and military ranks. Finding official guidance that unambiguously describes these civilian-to-military equivalencies proved elusive, however DoD Instruction 1000.01, *Identification (ID) Cards Required by the Geneva Conventions*, cites specific military-civilian equivalent grade relationships.⁶ Identified largely to govern the treatment of prisoners of war, the military-civilian grade equivalencies within DoD 1000.01 appear to be consistent with accepted practice within the DoD. Further guidance for civilian-to-military equivalencies can be found in the DoD Financial Management regulation. This regulation provides grade-rank equivalencies based exclusively on costs. Specifically, military ranks are “costed” at civilian equivalent rates using prescribed rates.⁷

The aforementioned DoD regulations are in sync with one another and both support the customary treatment of civilian employees. For instance, civilian grades below the GS-12 level have not customarily been associated with a specific military rank. DoD 1000.01 provides an explanation for this practice, as layers of overlap exists between lower GS grades and commissioned officers, warrant officers and enlisted personnel. Above the GS-13 level, grade-rank relationships become less ambiguous, as the custom of associating GS-14 with O-5 and GS-15 with O-6 is supported by DoD instruction.

Civilian members of the Senior Executive Service (SES) are customarily recognized as being equivalent to general officers. The exact general officer equivalency has more to do with the position held as opposed to the actual SES grade, but in general, civilian members of the SES are afforded the responsibilities and protocol equivalent to that of general officers.⁸ This assertion holds true in practice and within DoD regulatory guidance. However when considering

senior executives for assignment, leadership must bear the additional burden of looking deeper into each candidate's background, as grade-based assumptions are problematical.

Summary of the Issues

At this point of the paper, I have established that the notion of civilian-to-military equivalencies is indeed grounded by DoD regulation. However, this has led many to make the assumption that civilian employees possess levels of training, education and development similar to their military counterparts. The objective here is to highlight several factors which should discourage the automatic assumption of civilian equivalencies in the areas of training, education, career progression and leadership development. Additionally, aspects of the civil service system that contribute to vast disparities in the backgrounds of employees of similar grades will be highlighted as well.

Military Development Model. Before we examine the practice within DoD to develop civilians, it will be extremely instructive to briefly review what's typical of a military officer progressing through the grades. A primary advantage that military officers have over their civilian counterparts is that lieutenants have significant responsibilities much earlier in their careers, which gives them a corresponding early start on developing strategic leadership skills.⁹ It is commonplace for civilians to wait ten or more years for opportunities to lead a project or be given first line supervisory responsibility.

Another salient characteristic is that military officers receive a head start in the area of formal leadership development and training. The Officer Continuum of Education (Figure 1 below) offers an excellent overview of officer leadership development. Recognizing that there are a number of different commissioning sources, the fact remains that every officer – with the

small exception of some medical personnel – starts out as an O-1. This simple distinction gives the officer corps a common reference point.

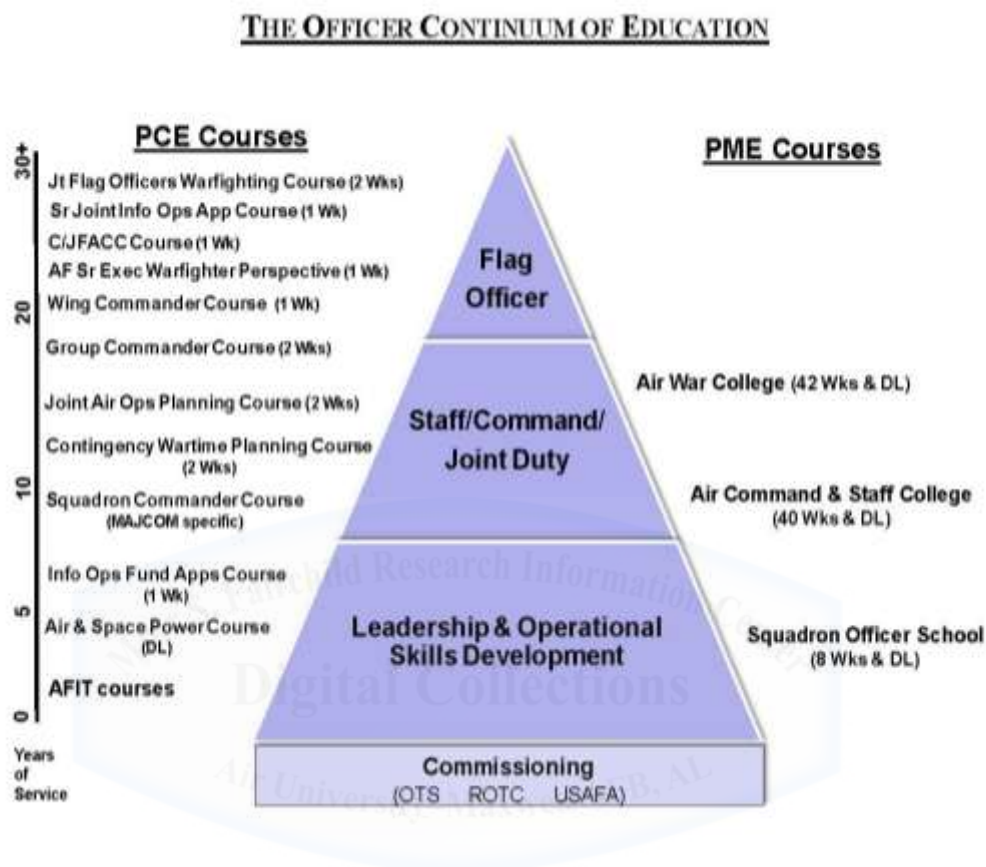


Figure 1 – Officer Continuum of Education Model¹⁰

An important element of this model is the fact that upon commissioning, every officer enters leadership and operational skills development. Regardless of specialty, the importance of developing leadership skills and attributes is emphasized early. As officers move up the ranks, leadership tasks become more complex and sophisticated. Leadership skills needed at each successive level build upon those developed earlier. The Air Force's emphasis on leadership allows officers to be prepared to lead more complex and interdependent organizations and have expanded personal responsibility and authority.¹¹

The Air Force culture of embracing leadership as fundamental to officer development has been very effective in producing consistency across the senior ranks. It is expected that members of similar grade will generally have gone through similar training, have similar tenure and have similar levels of education. Therefore as a matter of practice, certain assumptions can be made of Air Force officers with a fair degree of accuracy. An analysis of data retrieved from the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) Interactive Demographic Analysis System (IDEAS) supports this assumption.

An IDEAS query revealed a remarkable level of consistency within the areas of education and training among active duty O-6's. Of 3595 O-6 records, only two reflected a "highest degree held" that was below the master's degree level. The distribution of education levels are: 2734 master's degrees, 708 professional degrees and 151 PhDs.¹² This group also possessed consistent levels of PME, with 76 percent having at least one in-resident developmental course.

Employee Accessions. The preceding review of the Officer Continuum of Education provides a good point of departure to isolate root causes for the suboptimal process for developing civilian leaders. The disparity begins with the respective accession processes. With very few exceptions, Air Force officers are commissioned as 2nd Lieutenants. As asserted previously, this provides each officer with a common reference point. The Officer Continuum of Education further insures that each officer receives education and training at predictable points in their career. Conversely, DoD civilians do not share common beginnings and leadership development is relegated as an optional activity, leaving each employee to pursue training opportunities on their own.

One of the key elements of personnel accession within the civil service is the ability to bring talent into the government from an unlimited number of sources and employ those resources at any grade. This affords management broad leverage to target applicants with specific expertise in an effort to fill specific vacancies. This practice, which I'll refer to as lateral accession, introduces the negative consequence of having a workforce with vastly different backgrounds, experiences and developmental needs.

Within a system that utilizes the broad practice of lateral accessions, it becomes fairly difficult to develop standards for education, training and leadership development for civilian employees. Newly onboarded employees possess a broad range of experiences and expertise, which severely limits attempts to link specific developmental events to specific grades. Therefore, education and training are typically focused on the requirements of the position and make little attempt at developing a workforce to be future leaders.

Mentoring. The practice of external accessions has made the concept of mentoring extremely difficult. A number of scholars and certainly numerous practitioners have touted the importance of mentorship in promoting leader development. In his book *Mentorship*, L.T. Eby describes mentoring as a developmentally oriented interpersonal relationship that is typically between a more experienced person and a less experienced person.¹³ In many cases, mentoring is severely marginalized by the preponderance of mentors who entered federal service near the top of the grade scale. In these cases, the ability to advise the mentee or protégée of possible career pitfalls is unrealistic, since the prospective mentor would not have the benefit of that experience.

Position Classification. In the absence of a compulsory leadership development model, civilian employee training assumes an inward focus. As a consequence, the training and

development of the civilian workforce is centered on the concept of classification standards. The classification standards program for positions in the General Schedule was established by the Classification Act of 1949, which has been codified in chapter 51 of title 5, United States Code.¹⁴ These standards determine how an employee must perform in order to be successful in the position. The process of position classification categorizes, measures, and assigns a grade to the significant and substantive features of a position. The resulting position description (PD) becomes a literal anchor from which all personnel development decisions are based.

According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the PD documents the major duties, responsibilities, and organizational relationships of a job and serves as the official record of the classification of the position.¹⁵ The PD also describes what is termed the full performance level of the position. This essentially serves to establish minimum requirements and maximum grade of a position, effectively constricting scope of responsibilities. As long as an employee performs satisfactorily at the full performance level, there are no forcing mechanisms (or incentives in many cases) to move the employee into jobs of increased scope and responsibility.

PDs can also have the effect of inhibiting leadership development. Emphasis on technical competence effectively drives employee training requirements. If a position is not classified as supervisory, then the employee cannot serve in supervisory roles and therefore, will not necessarily be afforded supervisory/leadership training. Within this system, it would be incorrect to assume that a DoD civilian has any supervisory experience based solely on grade. This is not to suggest that the DoD is void of civilian leaders; however, civilian service regulations do not promote prescriptive force devolvment.

Within the DoD, ideals such as the whole person concept and career broadening are alien to most civilian employees. As the Department often looks to its civilian force as a source of

continuity and experience, there is a tendency for employees to jobstead. Jobsteading is the tendency to stay in one job for an extended period of time (often to the point of stagnation). Opportunities such as joint duty, contingency deployments, external assignments and inter-departmental postings are not part of the organizational culture. The point here is not to infer that these opportunities do not exist, but only to suggest that they are not a critical part of civilian workforce planning and are not intrinsically linked to performance evaluation and promotion.

Impediments to Leadership Development. The preceding discussion was aimed at identifying current aspects of DoD civilian service which presents challenges to the training and development of leaders. This by no means proposes that good leadership is absent among senior civilians. Quite to the contrary, many civilians serve in top leadership positions and have proven to be very effective. What is being suggested is that the system does little to foster broad development of civilian employees. In other words, DoD civilians become effective leaders in spite of the system, not because of it.

While there have been a number of attempts to improve the development of DoD civilian leaders, there still remains significant systemic obstacles that constrain the effort. My research has led me to the conclusion that government bureaucracy itself lies at the heart of the problem. Mike Mears, former chief of human capital within the Central Intelligence Agency, accurately depicts the problem, as he asserts the federal government's management framework resembles that of the factories of a century ago.¹⁶ The government workforce was structured in order to efficiently execute jobs such as administering work orders and overseeing repetitive tasks.¹⁷ As a consequence, government agencies have struggled to foster leadership development, as job requirements remain focused on administration at the expense of leadership.

There are indications that the DoD recognized the importance of civilian leader development, as a competency model has recently been introduced. The leader development competency model consists of 31 leadership competencies based on the Office of Personnel Management Executive Core Qualifications.¹⁸ While this effort is commendable, it remains largely elective for employees and lacks broad appeal, since evaluating job performance remains focused on technical aspects of the position. Moreover, the model will continue to be marginalized as the civilian personnel system allow promotions and accessions to occur without regard to obtaining or possessing any of the 31 leadership competencies.



Recommendations

In order to truly embrace Total Force concepts and leverage DoD civilians to fill key leadership positions, the Department must be amenable to adopting a fundamentally different civilian force development strategy. Leadership development must start early and be maintained throughout an employee's career, thereby creating a larger pool of potential senior leaders with the desired skills and experience. In researching the current DoD civilian service environment, four areas appear to contribute significantly to the problematic development of leaders. First among these areas is the lack of a professional work force.

Professionalize the Force. Professionalization of the government civilian workforce is not a new concept and has in the past, been mired in controversy. Much of the controversy arose from the inability to settle upon an unambiguous definition. The manifold literature on the topic suggests no general consensus on an authoritative definition of a profession. As early as 1939, Oliver Garceau asserted that, "there is no accepted definition of a profession...interpretation of such a concept is a matter of personal temperament".¹⁹

The following excerpt from the Army Field Manual offers a contemporary characterization of a profession.

The purpose of any profession is to serve society by effectively delivering a necessary and useful specialized service. To fulfill those societal needs, professions-such as, medicine, law, the clergy, and the military-develop and maintain distinct bodies of specialized knowledge and impart expertise through formal, theoretical, and practical education. Each profession establishes a unique subculture that distinguishes practitioners from the society they serve while supporting and enhancing that society. Professions create their own standards of

*performance and codes of ethics to maintain their effectiveness. To that end, they develop particular vocabularies, establish journals, and sometimes adopt distinct forms of dress. In exchange for holding their membership to high technical and ethical standards, society grants professionals a great deal of autonomy.*²⁰

While the Army Field Manual definition is generally broad, it does highlight benefits of education, culture and standards of performance. Targeting these aspects of professionalism is not controversial and can be effectively implemented, as evidenced within the DoD acquisition corps.

The DoD has demonstrated the ability to professionalize parts of the civilian workforce, as it sought to improve the performance of the acquisition cadre with the enactment of the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA). Passage of Public Law 101-510, which enacted DAWIA in 1990, represented a major step forward in the professionalization of the DoD acquisition workforce.²¹ The purpose of DAWIA was to improve the effectiveness of employees who manage and execute defense acquisition programs. More importantly, DAWIA required the establishment of an Acquisition Corps and professionalization of the acquisition workforce through the establishment of education, training, and acquisition-related experience requirements.

DAWIA is broadly accepted as an effective mechanism to improve the overall quality of the acquisition workforce. However it is instructive to recognize that DAWIA was successful in part due to the fact that there was no overt campaign to professionalize the acquisition corps. It is generally accepted that higher levels of professionalization are related to lower levels of bureaucratization and greater production, yet the issue remains controversial.²² DAWIA effectively skirted the controversy that plagued previous attempts at professionalization of civil

service by focusing on those sub-elements that would improve employee performance.

Emphasis on establishing education, training and experience requirements ultimately had the net effect of creating a professional workforce.

Establish Minimum Education Requirements. Any effort to scale the DAWIA model to the broader DoD civilian workforce should start with the establishment of firm education requirements. This requirement may sound trivial, however, civilian personnel data suggests otherwise. A recent query of the personnel database of a large DoD agency revealed broad disparities in education among employees in the grade of GS-15. Of the 387 records pulled, 19 employees, or roughly five percent, did not hold at least a bachelor's degree.²³ Precise statistics were not available for the entire workforce; however, it was asserted by knowledgeable manpower analysts that education levels of junior employees were disproportionately lower.²⁴ DAWIA was successful in tackling this issue within the acquisition workforce and similar measures taken for the broader DoD civilian cadre would be likewise effective.

Therefore to bring about greater professionalism within the DoD civilian workforce, the department must mandate that employees at or above the GS-13 level possess at a minimum, a 4-year degree from an accredited college or university. The GS-13 level is significant because this is the point where unambiguous civilian-to-military equivalencies begin. Embracing Total Force management practices is severely marginalized when employees of equivalent grade/rank lack basic educational backgrounds. Establishing firm education requirements for civilian employees will create a foundation for advanced training and leadership development opportunities that are aligned closer to their military counterparts.

Once education requirements are embraced as organizational norms, junior employees will seek early opportunities for educational advancement, which will be uplifting for the entire

workforce. Higher education can result in higher levels of productivity, higher quality of work, increased self-motivation and increased employee versatility. Additionally, elevating the overall education level of the work force will allow the federal government to keep pace with current trends within the private sector. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, professions that require college degrees are expected to experience significantly higher rates of growth. Specifically, professions in the master's degree category are projected to grow fastest, with an estimated 22 percent growth rate. Similarly, professions in the bachelor's degree category can expect to experience a growth rate of 17 percent.²⁵

Restrict Lateral Accessions. The civilian employee accession process is one of the greatest impediments to leadership development and must be addressed. In his book *Effective Succession Planning : Ensuring Leadership Continuity and Building Talent From Within*, William Rothwell advocates for the development of leaders from within an organization, but he also acknowledges contractual constraints (i.e., civil service, union contracts), such as people working out of their job classification.²⁶ Rothwell's caution is indicative of the difficulties that arise from excessive use of lateral accessions.

As I introduced the *Officer Continuum of Education*, it should be clear that a practice of lateral officer accessions would be destructive to this model. Nevertheless, civilian employees continue to be brought into government service from manifold sources, with unconstrained backgrounds and often secure entry at senior GS grades. A 1989 study on *Rebuilding Public Service* specifies that up to 70,000 white collar employees are brought into the federal government each year. What is most surprising, according to the *Commission's Task Force on Education and Training*, is how few of these employees were prepared to take on leadership responsibilities and must receive tailored training.²⁷ These statistics remain relevant today, as

career/leadership development programs lack structure and are tailored to the needs of the individual employee. Under these conditions, the needs of the organization are not the primary focus and leadership development programs suffer as a result.

Lateral accessions are not likely to disappear from civil service, as there is a clear benefit to bringing uniquely skilled, technically competent employees directly into key positions. In spite of this benefit, specific conditions need to be put in place to govern usage. As a general practice, lateral accessions should be limited to the grades of GS-12 and below. This provision would reduce the number of senior civilian employees who lack any form of supervisory and/or leadership experience. Since civilian careers are typically longer than those of military service members, civilian employees can still enjoy a fair degree of leadership development from the GS-12 level onward.

Acknowledging that organizations will occasionally have senior personnel vacancies that must be filled via lateral accession, an expanded utilization of interagency/interdepartmental hiring should be the first consideration. Leveraging employees from different parts of the government could be extremely advantageous, particularly at the GS-14/15 grades. Additionally, the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) mobility program provides for the temporary assignment of personnel between the Federal Government and state and local governments, colleges and universities, Indian tribal governments, federally funded research and development centers, and other eligible organizations.²⁸ OPM statistics suggests agencies do not take full advantage of the IPA program which, if used strategically, could help agencies meet their needs for hard-to-fill positions.²⁹

As the DoD determines its leadership needs, leaders should be cultivated from inside the organization. In those extreme cases where the Department deems it necessary to seek external

applicants for senior executive positions, these employees should generally be classified as term or temporary appointments. Under OPM regulations, the DoD may make temporary appointments when they do not need an employee's services on a permanent basis. Temporary appointments are limited to one year, but may be extended to meet mission requirements.³⁰ Political appointees would not be covered under this provision, as they serve at the pleasure of the President.

Reform Position Classification. After the practice of lateral accessions is properly addressed, the Department should initiate an effort to reform the position classification system. As codified in law, the position classification system was designed to ensure that equal pay be provided for substantially equal work. However, the ideal of equity has emerged as the absolute goal of the system, as opposed to being a means of achieving larger goals of the unit or organization. According to OPM polling, government managers assert that their respective organizations have diverse missions, challenges, organizational structures, values, and cultures, and that they must respond to ever-changing external conditions. The classification system must not be so ridged that it cannot respond to new ways of designing work, the changing value of jobs, or changes in the work itself.³¹

The DoD should seek to reform the classification system to provide greater flexibility and afford early developmental opportunities for civilian employees. Managers must be given the flexibility to develop employees by extending early opportunities to serve in positions of supervision and leadership. The process of developing emerging leaders typically starts with a frontline leadership role. This first leadership position is where an individual makes the difficult transition from contributor to leader.³² For civilian employees, the process for affording early leadership opportunities is unnecessarily difficult.

Under the current system, DoD civilians may serve in supervisory roles only if their position is classified as supervisory. The rigidity of this requirement effectively limits growth, inhibits the development of potential leaders and ultimately reduces the pool of experienced leaders at senior levels. To remedy this problem, the DoD must cease the practice of hard coding positions as non-supervisory. The designation of an Air Force member as a supervisor is accomplished via a data update within the Military Personnel Data System (MILPDS).³³ Reforming the classification system to allow for this manner of flexibility would permit assignment of supervisory responsibility to occur as a matter of routine and enhance the early development of civilian leaders.

Reforming the classification system must also focus on eliminating the culture of homesteading. Within the DoD civilian workforce, homesteading results in part from the specificity of position classification. This specificity encourages employees to refine very specific areas of expertise, which tend to contribute to lengthy tenures within a specific job. In the past, the Department has viewed homesteading by civilian employees a source of continuity. While there is merit to this argument, excessive homesteading is not producing a large enough pool of employees with the requisite breadth of experience to effectively serve in senior leadership positions. This is a primary factor that contributes to the excessive reliance on lateral accession to fill key leadership position. As discussed earlier, a certain degree of lateral accessions must remain a part of the civilian personnel system; however, it should not remain a remedy for the inefficient development of the force.

Institutionalize Employee Mobility. The final recommendation to improve the development of DoD civilian leaders is a call for enhanced opportunities for mobility. Civilian employees are currently able to participate in a number of programs such as external/joint

assignments, contingency deployments and interdepartmental postings. While these opportunities appear attractive on the surface, they run counter to the prevailing culture within the force. As discussed earlier, technical experts with long tenure in a specific job are accepted as the norm. In many cases, employees seeking to participate in mobility programs are discouraged by factors such as forfeiture of bonuses, missed opportunities for promotion and the general perception that externally posted employees typically go native.

Obstacles to broad acceptance of mobility opportunities can be mitigated by embracing an appraisal and promotion system that rewards employees that accept challenging career broadening assignments. There must be unambiguous linkages between breadth/depth of experience and advancement. The organizational culture could then be transformed into one which encourages employees to reach beyond their respective comfort zones and be rewarded for doing so. Creating a civilian corps with broad operational experiences and strategic points of view will be extremely beneficial to the ultimate goal of incorporating senior civilian leaders into the Total Force.

Conclusion

Unless the DoD commits to making leadership inherent to employee development, the ability to use civilians in senior leadership positions will continue to suffer. It is impossible to ignore the significant inconsistencies that exist among government civilians in the grade of GS-15 and above, as varying degrees of actual leadership experience results in an uneven leader candidate pool. My assertion is that professionalization and adoption of a fundamentally different civilian force development strategy could result in stronger civilian leaders.

Professionalization of government civilians, in one context or another, has certainly been one of the more divisive topics addressed within academic public administration literature. Academics and practitioners alike, have all debated elements of professionalization with varying degrees of passion for decades. Positive aspects of professionalization are broadly accepted and allowed for the successful adoption of initiatives such as DAWIA.

An effort analogous to DAWIA, focused on improving the performance of the civilian workforce and instilling a culture of leadership development, could enjoy similar success. However, any initiative to establish a less ambiguous career development path for government civilians would undoubtedly be met with serious obstacles; many of which are grounded by statutory and regulatory aspects of civil service. Nevertheless, the expenditure of resources to remedy inefficiencies inherent to government service should be considered worthwhile. Total Force approaches to DoD leadership will undoubtedly take on greater emphasis as defense budgets continue to atrophy. Under the right conditions, DoD civilians would not only be afforded greater leadership roles and responsibilities, but a more professional corps will bring about levels of prestige and respect that often elude civil servants today.

Notes

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